

A full-length, sepia-toned portrait of a man standing outdoors. He is wearing a dark suit, a white shirt with a high collar, a patterned tie, and a dark bowler hat. He has a mustache and is looking slightly to the right. The background consists of dense foliage and a light-colored wall or path. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

A MYSTERIOUS
GENTLEMAN
Jacob Ravesteyn 1844-1910

Eddy Habben Jansen

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Utrecht, 2026

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Preface

In the late 1970s I visited an archive reading room for the first time, the then ‘Rijksarchief in de provincie Utrecht’ (State Archive in the province of Utrecht) on Alexander Numankade in Utrecht. A treasure chamber full of old books containing the names and other details of previous generations. I was about eight years old, and my Ravestein grandparents had taken me there; they had always had a great interest in the history of the family. They enjoyed talking about it and kept all kinds of old documents of ancestors at home as well. Over the years, all of these came into my possession: marriage booklets of great-grandparents, photographs from the nineteenth century, identity cards from the war, cash books, letters, and travel accounts. Paper memories that yield more questions than answers and encourage further research. Without a doubt the most intriguing was a correspondence from 1924, between my great-grandfather and a firm of solicitors in London. The subject: a certain Jacob Ravesteyn, a cousin of my great-grandfather. Enclosed with the letters were four photographs, a calling card, and a funeral card. Of the letters sent, only draft versions have been preserved, written in pencil on invoices from my great-grandfather’s shop or on the back of advertising leaflets. Of the letters received, the envelopes have also been kept, including the postage stamps bearing the image of King George V. The letters show that Jacob left for England in the 1860s in the company of Earl St. Maur and eventually owned a hotel in the seaside resort of Torquay. The central question in

the correspondence is whether it can be proven that Jacob was a witness at the earl's wedding.

I believe I have had the letters in my possession since the early 1990s, but it was only with the arrival of the internet that my own research into them truly gathered momentum. A great deal turns out to be known about Earl St. Maur, and I even came into contact with a somewhat eccentric Englishman who was also researching the earl, Joe Silmon-Monerri (1937–2016). My research took me in 2005 to Torquay and Bournemouth, where I visited archives and various locations, including Jacob's grave, which still exists. In the same week I also visited Joe in Manchester. He lived in a tiny apartment with several thousand books. Joe tried to prove that his grandfather was in fact a son of the earl and wrote a substantial book about it¹. He never found conclusive proof.

In 2009 I discovered that there were presumably still living descendants of Jacob in Canada, and suddenly I had his great-grandson, Terry Dean, on the telephone. He, too, turns out to possess various documents. It would not be until 2025 that I would meet him in Calgary, during a holiday in Canada. Now that more and more sources are also becoming available online, such as local newspapers from Torquay, my meeting with Terry provides a good reason to finally set down on paper the findings of thirty years of research.

Eddy Habben Jansen
Utrecht, March 2026



In Joe Silmon's apartment, 2005



Visiting Terry Dean, 2025

Fifty Pounds for a Witness

On 25 November 1924, a small advertisement appears in several Dutch newspapers. The London law firm Church Rackham & Co. offers a reward of no less than fifty pounds for “witnesses or information concerning the marriage of an English lady named ROSINA (or Rosa) ELISABETH



SWAN.” The British lawyers address a Dutch readership because “one of the witnesses is believed to be a man by the name of RAVESTEYN.”

In the village of Groenekan, near Utrecht, the fifty-eight-year-old grocer Dirk Ravestein immediately realises that this refers to his nephew Jacob, who had since died. And the reward is badly needed. Converted into Dutch currency, it amounts to roughly

570 guilders — a sum that in 1924 would, for example, pay a year’s rent on a house or cover the wages of a maid for two years. A great deal of money, then. Dirk has fourteen children, eight of whom still live at home. Nearly blind as a result of an eye disease, he depends on his children to run the shop.

That very day, the almost blind Dirk had one of his sons write a letter to London. For a year, letters travel back and forth



Dirk Ravestein

between Groenekan and London. This largely preserved correspondence forms the starting point for this biographical sketch of Jacob Ravestein. It is an unusual life story for the son of a Dutch farming family. In his second letter, Dirk Ravestein summed it up as follows:

“After practising several trades, he became a waiter in a hotel on the Boompjes in Rotterdam. There he met a certain Englishman, who was very wealthy. He entered this man’s service, travelled through various countries with him, and was eventually placed by this gentleman in a hotel in Torquay.”

The correspondence, however, yielded no “information concerning the marriage.” The reward of fifty pounds was never paid. The questions surrounding the marriage of Rosina Swan would never be answered. Rosina’s son Harold sought to prove that his mother had once been married to the Earl St. Maur. Had he succeeded, he would have become the lawful heir to the noble titles and the family fortune. Jacob Ravestein was said to have been a witness at the wedding and could therefore have played a crucial role for Harold.

The alleged witness also appears in *The Dukes*, a book by Brian Masters published in 1975: “The mysterious gentleman was hustled away, and later that year opened a shop in Torquay with money he did not have.”²² In this way, Jacob Ravesteyn — originally from the farming village of Harmelen — secured a modest place in British history books.



Harold St Maur

The Ravestein Family

The Breudijk is a quiet country road, one of thousands like it in the Netherlands. It is located just north of the village of Harmelen. You only pass through if you have business there or happen to live nearby. Every day, however, thousands of people speed past by train. Only once, on a disastrous day in 1962, did this place briefly become the centre of national attention. On the morning of 9 January, two passenger trains collided head-on near the Breudijk. Ninety-one people lost their lives in what remains the deadliest railway disaster in Dutch history. The memory has faded with time, but for decades the otherwise anonymous village of Harmelen was widely known as the site of that catastrophe.

Jacob saw the first trains run past here when he was eleven years old.



Jacob was born on 14 June 1844 at five o'clock in the afternoon, in the house of his grandparents on the Breudijk. They lived at number 54, in Indijk —

once an independent municipality, but since 1812 part of the municipality of Harmelen. His mother was the nineteen-year-

old Annigje Ravestein (1824–1891). She was unmarried and, according to the birth certificate, living in Harmelen at the time, although she had moved to Woerden two years earlier.

Jacob's grandfather, Hendrik Ravestein (1793–1866), reported the birth of his grandson at the town hall. He was accompanied by two acquaintances who acted as witnesses: the sixty-five-year-old farmer Klaas (Nicolaas) de Vos and the thirty-nine-year-old labourer Cornelis Verdel. Both men also lived at number 54. There must have been several dwellings on the same plot of land.

Jacob's father is unknown, and Annigje therefore passed on her own family name to her son. At that time in the Netherlands, almost all children were named according to fairly strict conventions, usually after grandparents and other relatives. In the Ravestein family, this generally meant first naming children after the grandparents on the father's side, followed by those on the mother's side. Annigje herself, as the second daughter, was named after her maternal grandmother, Annigje van Altpheer-Brouwer (1764–1860).

The origin of the name Jacob, however, remains unclear. Within the family, the only possible link is Annigje's grandfather, Dirk Jacobse Ravestein (1756–1820), who himself had a great-grandfather named Jacob. It is highly unusual in naming traditions to reach that far back in time — assuming one even knows the names of all one's ancestors. The name may refer to the child's biological father, perhaps someone who had a Jacob in his own family. Could the father have been

a son of farmer De Vos? De Vos's father-in-law was named Jacob, and the couple also had a son by that name, although he no longer lived with his parents in Harmelen. Or perhaps it was their younger son Huibert (1823–1867), who still lived at home and was roughly Annigje's age. We will never know.

The family had lived in Harmelen for nearly a century, but the earliest known ancestors of the Ravestein family lived in the mid-seventeenth century in Lakerveld, a hamlet between Lexmond and Meerkerk, about twenty kilometres south of Utrecht. Originally part of the province of Holland, it belongs to the province of Utrecht since 2019. Around 1650, Jacob Aartsz. (van) Ravesteijn was born there — the great-great-grandfather of Jacob's great-grandfather, six generations earlier. Very little is known about this ancestor. He had a brother, Jan Aartsz. van Ravesteijn, who served as a *beemraad* and *schepen*, local administrative offices in Lakerveld. Jacob and Jan were most likely farmers, as were most inhabitants of the area at the time. The patronymic "Aartsz." indicates that they were sons of a man named Aart. That is all that is known about their father; even whether he already used the same surname remains uncertain.

Family names were gradually adopted in the Low Countries. It was not until 1811 that surnames became legally compulsory, though most families already used them long before. Spellings could change over time, and handwritten registers easily produced variants such as Ravensteijn, Ravesteyn or Ravestyn. Only in the course of the nineteenth century — well after surnames became mandatory — did the spelling of many

family names become fixed. It is not unusual for different branches of the same family to carry differently spelled versions of a shared name, and the Ravestein family is no exception. In the seventeenth century, the ancestor Jacob Aartsz. used the name “Van Ravesteijn.” Today, most members of the family bear the name Ravestein, but Jacob, who later moved to England, would use the spelling Ravesteyn for almost his entire life. A distant cousin bears the name Ravestijn.

Little can be said with certainty about the origin of the name itself. Many family names derive from regions, places, or buildings, referring to the area from which a family originated. Ravestein appears to belong to this category. At least four



locations in the Netherlands bear names similar to Ravestein. First, there is the town of Ravenstein in the northeast of the province of North Brabant, on the river Maas. Second, there is a hamlet near Geldermalsen, named after the manor house Ravenstein located there. Near Baarn, there is also a farm

called Ravenstein. Finally, in Heenvliet, in South Holland on the island of Voorne, we find the ruins of the fortified house Ravesteyn, destroyed in 1489 during the Hook and Cod wars. Although it was rebuilt, it was reduced to rubble once again by

the Water Geuzen between 4 and 6 April 1572. Comparable place names can also be found in Belgium, such as Ravenstein Castle in Tervuren.

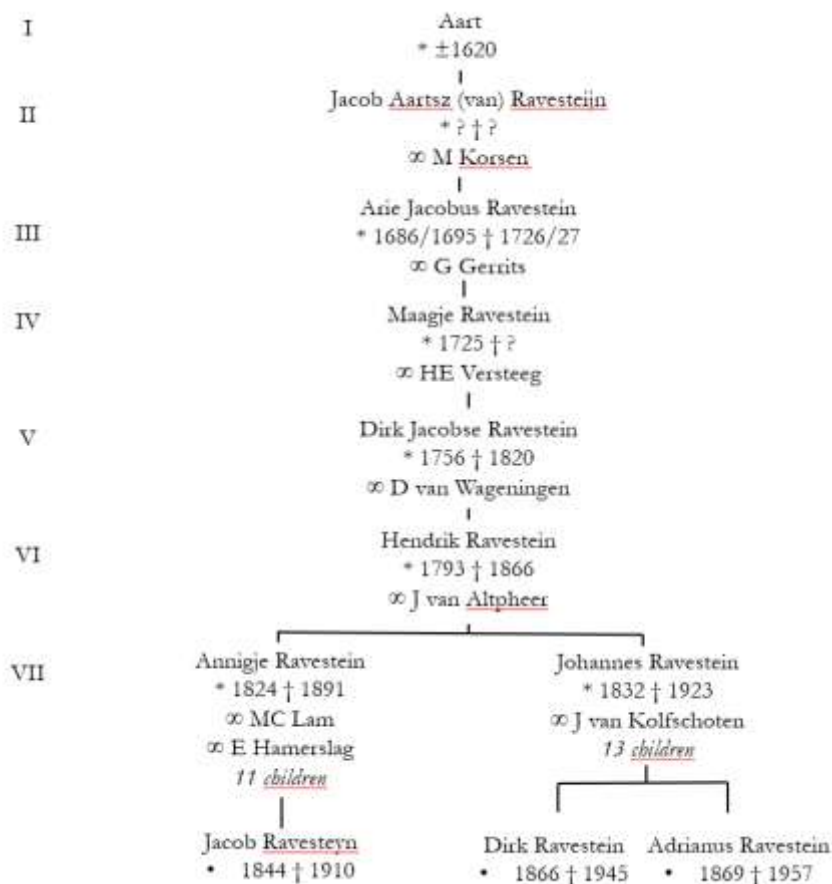
It is therefore hardly surprising that several families bear similar names. The *Dutch Repertory of Family Names*, which lists surnames recorded in 1947, includes all twelve possible spelling variants of the name: Ravenstein, van Ravenstein, Ravensteijn, van Ravensteijn, Ravestijn, van Ravestijn, Ravestein, van Ravestein, Ravesteijn, van Ravesteijn, Ravestijn and van Ravestijn. The number of variants says little about the number of distinct families. Because of spelling variations, members of the same family may carry different surnames, while identical names may also belong to entirely unrelated families.

In most cases, the use of family names does not extend much further back than the year 1600. People tended to move only short distances, which suggests that the roots of the family name are likely to be found near Lakerveld — most plausibly in the hamlet of Ravenstein near Geldermalsen, located about twenty kilometres to the east.

Jacob Aartsz. van Ravesteijn had at least six children. His son Arie moved to the province of Utrecht and settled in Linschoten, where, among others, his daughter Maagje was born in 1725. By around 1750 at the latest, she was living in Harmelen. She passed on the family name because she had three children whose father was unknown. Normally, children received their father's surname, but when the father was unknown, they took their mother's name. This was the case for

Jacob — and also for his great-grandfather Dirk Jacobse Ravestein, born in 1756 as the son of Maagje Ravestein.

Dirk had eleven children, among them Hendrik, Jacob's grandfather. Hendrik remained in Harmelen, where he had four daughters and two sons. His second daughter was Annigje — Jacob's mother.



Childhood in the Netherlands

Until the age of six, Jacob lived with his grandparents in Harmelen. Being raised by grandparents was common for children born out of wedlock to young mothers. In large families, the age difference between the youngest child and the first grandchildren was often small. Jacob's youngest aunt Johanna, his mother's sister, was only ten years old when Jacob was born. Johanna herself would later become the mother of two children born out of wedlock, before marrying Isaac van der Graaff in 1859.

When Jacob was five years old, his mother Annigje married the twenty-nine-year-old Marinus Cornelis Lam (1820-1882). Shortly after the wedding, their first daughter, Catharina, was born. The girl did not live to see her second birthday. The couple went on to have ten children together, six of whom died young. Eight months after his mother's marriage, Jacob moved to Woerden to live with his mother, his stepfather and his half-sister.

The family lived in the centre of Woerden on the Varkensmarkt, now the eastern part of Jan de Bakkerstraat, between the Achterstraat and the Hoge Wal, at the northernmost edge of the old town. Marinus ran a clog-making workshop there, and Jacob would later work there himself for some time as a clog maker.

At the age of nineteen, Jacob took an important step in his career by taking a position at the Hôtel des Pays-Bas, on the Janskerkhof in Utrecht. The hotel had opened in 1828 as *Logement De Nederlanden* and was renamed *Grand Hotel des Pays-Bas* in 1839. Well into the twentieth century it would remain known simply as “Pays-Bas” and enjoy a reputation as the most fashionable hotel in Utrecht. At the time Jacob worked there, the hotel was owned by Josephus Gerardus Schrederhof, who had taken it over from his brother-in-law in 1845.

Jacob was also housed at the hotel. At any given time, between nine and twelve members of staff lived on the premises. Some remained for many years, while others left within a year. Most of the staff, like Schrederhof himself, were Roman Catholic. In its recruitment advertisements, the hotel explicitly sought “servants of the Roman Catholic faith.” On 25 July 1863, an official in the Utrecht population register recorded “R.C.” next to the name of the new resident Jacob Ravestein, even though he had been raised in the Dutch Reformed Church. Did Jacob present himself as a Catholic in order to secure the job? Or did the clerk simply assume as much?

The advertisements also state that applicants who spoke French were “most desirable.” It seems unlikely that a nineteen-year-old clog maker from Woerden spoke much French. Yet the preference is understandable. Pays-Bas did not bear a French name by accident and was one of the very few hotels in the city. As such, it accommodated prominent visitors from the Netherlands and abroad. Newspapers occasionally



*The hotel in 1877
and today*

reported the presence of high-ranking royal or military guests. For Jacob, this was an introduction to an entirely new world.

Some guests stayed at the hotel for so long that the municipality registered it as their official place of residence. The Frenchman Claude Larpent, head of operations of the Central Railway Company, arrived at Pays-Bas more than a week before Jacob and remained until mid-August. The couple Alewijn–Fauze stayed at the hotel for seven months from October 1863 onwards. The Schrederhof family themselves — husband, wife and their twelve children — also lived in the hotel.

After two and a half years at Pays-Bas, Jacob left Utrecht for Rotterdam on 23 January 1866. His cousin Dirk would later write that Jacob found work there as a waiter in “a hotel on the Boompjes,” a quay along the Nieuwe Maas. This was most likely the renowned New Bath Hotel, which attracted many international guests³. It was here that Jacob is said to have met the thirty-one-year-old Earl St. Maur — the “very wealthy Englishman” mentioned in Dirk Ravestein’s letters. The encounter would prove decisive. The earl took Jacob into his service during his travels through Europe, and Jacob would eventually find himself in Torquay, in the south of England.

Earl St. Maur

Edward Adolphus Ferdinand Seymour, Earl St. Maur, was the eldest son of the 12th Duke of Somerset. Within the family he was known as Ferdy. Under British law, the eldest son would succeed as the next duke and would usually inherit the greater part of the family estates. His father was a prominent nobleman who, among other offices, served as First Lord of the Admiralty. As a result, Ferdy moved in the highest circles of British society. In 1856, for example, he attended the coronation of Tsar Alexander II of Russia alongside Lord Granville, and he later obtained a seat in the House of Lords.

The difficulty was that Ferdy showed little inclination to follow in his father's footsteps. He led an adventurous life, described in detail in Sir John Colville's book *Strange Inheritance*⁴, which centres on Ferdy's daughter, Ruth St. Maur. He travelled through Persia to Ceylon and India, where he served for a time in the British army. He later joined Garibaldi's forces in Italy under the assumed name Captain Richard Sarsfield, serving in the *Esercito Meridionale* (the Southern Army).

After returning to England, he encountered the seventeen-year-old maid Rosina Swan in 1866. She was described as "half gypsy," a reference to her mother's Roma background. Rosina was distressed after being badly treated in the household where she worked and met Ferdy in a park. He took her under his



Edward Adolphus Ferdinand Seymour (1835-1869)

protection, and the two began a relationship. Because her background made marriage impossible according to the conventions of the British aristocracy, Ferdy decided instead to travel with her.

In 1867, their daughter Ruth was born. A year later, the couple returned to England. In the spring of 1869, a son was born in or near Brighton, Richard Harold, usually known as Harold. Only around this time did Ferdinand St. Maur inform his family of the situation. Later that year, on 30 September, he died as the result of an emergency tracheotomy that went tragically wrong — performed under poor lighting in his flat in Mayfair, London⁵. His health had likely deteriorated as a consequence of illnesses contracted during his travels.

Ferdy's death left his father, the Duke of Somerset, without any legitimate male heirs. Ferdy's only younger brother, Edward Percy, had been equally adventurous and had died in India in 1865 after being attacked by a bear. Although the illegitimate grandson Harold bore the surname St. Maur, his status did not entitle him to inherit the noble titles of his forebears.

When Jacob Ravesteyn met St. Maur in Rotterdam in 1866, the young earl was probably travelling with his beloved en route to Germany. The journey through “various countries” described by Jacob's cousin Dirk ultimately led them to Tangier. The exact course of this journey is difficult to reconstruct. According to Colville, they first travelled to Germany and then crossed Europe by train, eventually reaching Tangier via Spain



Rosina Swan (1849-1873)

and Gibraltar. In St. Maur's surviving letters, we read that he arrived in San Sebastián on Saturday, 3 November 1866, having left London the previous Thursday and travelled by boat⁶. No letters from earlier in 1866 have survived, although newspaper reports indicate that he was still in London in February, July and August of that year.

From San Sebastián, the journey continued to Burgos, Madrid, Córdoba, Cádiz and Gibraltar, where the Anglican bishop offered him accommodation. From there, they travelled on to Tangier. The couple settled there and rented a house from the British consul. Once again, St. Maur lived under an assumed name, calling himself Captain Gray. He purchased a plot of land and, in the spring of 1867, had a house built there with a view of the Mediterranean Sea.

Little is known from the letters about the household staff. What is clear, however, is that if Jacob did indeed work for the earl in Tangier, he did so alongside several other servants. On 1 March 1867, Ferdy St. Maur wrote: "My cook has fallen ill, and remains absent, and both my other servants are by profession grooms, but the cookery has if anything improved."⁷ Was Jacob one of the two? On 5 July, St. Maur mentioned "I have two Germans working here and they feel no more than the Moors and Spaniards." He also employed a Moorish boy, later known as Mohamed U'led Slimane. After his naturalization as a British citizen and after being baptized and married in the Roman Catholic Church, he became known as William Weld Silmon.

When Earl St. Maur and Rosina Swan returned to England with their infant daughter Ruth aboard the P&O steamship



Ruth St Maur

Aurora in February 1868, the boy accompanied them. In England, Mohamed could rely on the support of the Seymour family. After St. Maur's death, they helped him find employment through family connections and friends, and he received a lifelong allowance. In support of his naturalization, the Duchess of Somerset wrote a letter of recommendation in 1877, stating that she had known him "since he was a young boy in the service of her

son, Earl St. Maur."⁸ Leonora, the severely disabled daughter of Mohamed's wife Sarah Monaghan Serrano from her previous marriage to the Italian captain Carlo Antonio Pasola, even lived for a time with the Seymour family at their Bulstrode estate, where she received medical care.



Mohamed Silmon

Settlement in Torquay

It is likely that Jacob travelled to England with the rest of the party. Perhaps he too benefited from the family's care and financial support. Some time after St. Maur's death, Jacob settled in Torquay, a seaside resort in south-west England. Dirk Ravestein wrote that Jacob was "placed by this gentleman [Earl St. Maur] in a hotel in Torquay." Since St. Maur died in 1869, this would suggest that Jacob began working at the hotel before that date. Information from various official documents, however, points in a different direction. According to letters from the law firm, Jacob remained in St. Maur's service until 1868. An article in the *Caterer and Hotel Keepers' Gazette* from 1896 even claims that the Duke of Somerset, St. Maur's father, appointed Jacob as a "messenger at the Home Office" upon his arrival in England.

The earliest firm evidence of Jacob's presence in England dates from a few years later, when he appears in Torquay in 1871. From that point onward — or more precisely from 1876 — his movements can be traced with reasonable accuracy. It is unclear whether Jacob ever consciously decided to remain in England, but he did eventually become naturalized, although this was not strictly necessary. Torquay enjoyed a mild climate and had developed into a fashionable resort in the preceding decades.

Long before Jacob arrived, another illustrious Dutchman had set foot nearby, landing at Brixham. In 1688, William III of Orange came ashore there before becoming King of England. On the bicentenary of that event, a statue of the king was erected in the presence of a Dutch minister. Jacob would be among the guests at the official luncheon marking the occasion.

Especially during the winter months, Torquay attracted members of prominent families, creating a demand for domestic servants. At the census of 1871, Jacob was living and



Unwin Heathcote

working as a footman with the family of Unwin Heathcote at 10 Hesketh Crescent in Torquay. It is reasonable to assume that references from former employers played a role in the hiring of domestic staff. It is possible that the Heathcotes were acquainted with the Seymour family, although no direct evidence for this exists.

The Seymours owned Stover Lodge in the area, about fifteen kilometres north-west of Torquay. Harold St. Maur inherited this house from his grandparents and lived there. The old family castle of Berry Pomeroy, by then a ruin, lay about ten kilometres to the south-west.

No trace of Jacob can be found for the period between 1871 and 1876. He did not immediately leave the Heathcote household after the census of 2 April 1871, but it is not until

10 August 1876 that he reappears in the records, when he married the twenty-six-year-old Jane Risdon at the Congregational Church in Dawlish, in the Newton Abbot district. At the time of the marriage, both were living at Villa Ditton on Lower Warberry Road in Torquay. Jacob was employed there as a butler by the Danish-born businessman Hermann Philippe Ree (1798–1877), who had been living at Villa Ditton since at least 1873.

Jacob would later claim that during these years he had served in the Dutch colonial army in the Dutch East Indies, later Indonesia. The family even preserved medals, including the



Aceh Medal of 1873–1874, awarded to participants in the campaign in the northern Sumatran province. Dutch military archives, however, contain no trace of him. The service records from that period are well preserved and readily accessible, yet the name Jacob

Ravesteyn (or Ravestein) does not appear. Although Jacob undoubtedly led an unconventional life for his time, such a detour would be remarkable: at nearly thirty years of age, he would have interrupted his life in Torquay — where he is recorded as a servant in affluent households in both 1871 and 1876 — to embark on a military career on the other side of the world.

Jane's occupation is not stated in the marriage certificate, but she likely worked in the household at Villa Ditton as well. In any case, she was living far from her parental home, which lay more than sixty kilometres to the north-west, near Black Torrington. Her father, Joseph Risdon, is listed in the 1851 census as a farmer with 150 acres of land and three employees. Jane had four sisters and one brother.

One striking detail in the marriage certificate is the name given for Jacob's father: William Ravesteyn, deceased, a clog maker by trade. Jacob's stepfather, Marinus Cornelis Lam, was also a clog maker, but he was still alive at the time of the marriage. Was Jacob merely attempting to conceal his illegitimate birth by inventing a name? Or did he know the identity of his biological father, with the given name William hinting at that connection?

It can be assumed that Jacob and Jane met as colleagues at Villa Ditton. The reason for the marriage is clear: within four months, their son William Andrew was born, apparently named after the "William" whom Jacob had recorded as his father in the marriage certificate. William was born in Halwill, in the area where Jane herself had been born. As this place is also listed as the mother's residence in the birth record, the couple — or Jane alone — may have been staying temporarily with her parents.

Between 1876 and 1880, the family lived at 78 Union Street. A few days after the birth of his son, Jacob took over the licence of the *Prince of Wales* beerhouse at that address from George

Norton. At the time of the birth of his second son, Herman Jacob, in 1878, Jacob is recorded as a Commercial Boarding House Keeper. He is also described as a Lodging House Keeper. This indicates that the establishment offered not only beer, but also accommodation and meals. According to a trade directory from that year, the premises included dining rooms and a restaurant, and tobacco was also sold⁹. A year later, Jacob advertised in local newspapers as the exclusive agent for “Swanger’s native oysters” in Torquay.

In July 1880, in the birth certificate of his daughter Emily Jacob is described as a Licensed Victualler — someone authorised to sell alcohol. The address is still given as “Commercial Hotel, Torquay.” Shortly thereafter, it was time for the next step: Edward Tozer took over the licence of the *Prince of Wales* from Jacob. Ten years later, the inn was run by Robert Howe. Jacob continued his career elsewhere along the same street.



The Prince of Wales, 20th century



Jacob Ravesteyn



According to Dirk Ravestein, this is a photograph of Jacob's first wife, Jane Risdon. However, dating based on the photographer's address on the back of the photograph indicates that this portrait was taken after her death. It is therefore more likely that this is Jacob's second wife, Sarah Ann Thomas.



Union Street, end of 19th century



Union Street, 1861

The Union Hotel

In August 1880, Jacob Ravesteyn took over the Union Hotel in Union Street, at numbers 70–71, from John Mogridge, who was forced to retire for reasons of ill health. In advertisements Mogridge described the establishment as a thriving business, although he had in fact been trying to sell it for more than a year and a half. The Union Hotel occupied a lively and central location in Torquay. A few doors away stood the Exeter Hotel, while Union Street itself was lined with shops: a shoemaker next door to the hotel and, across the street, a butcher, a grocer, a photographer and a barber. Tea, bread, clothing, crockery, fruit and medicines could all be purchased nearby. Opposite the hotel stood the Town Hall, reinforcing Union Street's position as one of the town's commercial and administrative centres.

The Union Hotel was built in 1831, shortly after Union Street was laid out in 1828. It stood on the site of the former Fleete Mill, an old watermill that had been demolished. For many years a millstone from that mill was said to have been displayed in the hotel bar¹⁰. John Mogridge was the hotel's first proprietor, and under his ownership it became an important centre of entertainment in Torquay. It was known variously as Mogridge's Union Hotel or Mogridge's Union Commercial Hotel. Behind the hotel stood the Union Hall, connected to the main building, which in the late 1840s was converted into a



Entrance of the Union Hotel

small theatre by theatre director Doel. Until 1852, this hall—together with the ballroom of the Royal Hotel—was one of the few public spaces in the town. Municipal council meetings, auctions and other public gatherings were held there. Even in Jacob Ravesteyn's time auctions were still regularly organised, including sales of houses.

As a hotel, the Union was particularly popular with commercial travellers. Torquay's more affluent visitors generally stayed in the larger and more luxurious hotels, such as The Imperial, but the Union Hotel nevertheless attracted some distinguished guests. In 1856, for example, the politician and writer Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton stayed there for a time¹¹.

At the moment of purchase in 1880, the hotel had seventeen bedrooms, as well as a bar, a coffee room, several sitting rooms, stabling for nine horses, a coach house and spacious cellars. For commercial travellers there was a dedicated 'commercial room', where they could receive clients and display their goods. The dining room was suitable for large parties. In April 1881 the *Western Times* reported on a dinner organised by Ravesteyn for one hundred members of the Ancient Order of Foresters, a friendly society that supported its members and their families in cases of illness or unemployment.

During the first years, Jacob's brother-in-law Joseph and sister-in-law Elizabeth Risdon also lived in the hotel. Elizabeth worked behind the bar. Joseph would later run hotels of his own: first the Rising Sun Inn and, from 1889, the Exeter Hotel,



immediately next door to the Union Hotel. Together with Jacob he served for a time on the committee of the Torquay Licensed Victualler's Association. The association had something of a family character. Another brother-in-law, George Scott Kentisbeer—married to Elizabeth—was also on the committee; he was the proprietor of the Burton Ale House in Temperance Street. A fourth enterprising family member was Joseph's sister Ann Risdon, who ran the Hesketh Arms in Meadfoot Lane, on the opposite side of the harbour. In 1896 Joseph left Torquay and took over the Victory Inn in Sidwell Street, Exeter. He later lived at 3 Devonshire Place in Exeter and died there in 1927.

Shortly after the move to the Union Hotel, tragedy struck the Ravesteyn family. In late August Jane was injured to her hands, arms and face by the explosion of an oil lamp. Not long afterwards she became seriously ill with tuberculosis. In the second half of the nineteenth century tuberculosis was one of the leading causes of death; between 1851 and 1910 four million people in England and Wales died from the disease. Many victims were young adults, giving tuberculosis the grim nickname 'the robber of youth'. After six months of illness and repeated bouts of pneumonia, Jane died on 17 December 1881 at the age of thirty-one. She was buried in Torquay, her gravestone bearing the words of Psalm 51:9: *Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.*

Jacob was left with responsibility for the hotel and for three young children, William Andrew, Herman Jacob and Emily, aged five, three and one. The children were cared for in part by

a nursemaid, thirteen-year-old Florence Widdicombe, the daughter of Mary Widdicombe, a thirty-one-year-old widow who worked as the hotel's cook. Mary had two other children. Her twelve-year-old son George lived with her parents in Kingsteignton, north of Torquay. Losing a spouse at a young age or growing up without both parents was by no means uncommon in the nineteenth century.

A year later Jacob remarried in Camden Town, St Pancras, Middlesex. The marriage was solemnized by Reverend



REV. H. WALTER REYNOLDS.

Reynolds. His second wife was Sarah Ann Thomas, born in Dartmouth, Devon. On the marriage certificate Jacob gave his father's name as 'James Ravesteyn, Captain of the Batavian Regiment'. This suggests that he had embellished his origins: no longer the son of a Dutch clog-maker named William, but of a military officer named James. Two weeks after the wedding the couple

stayed at the luxurious Queen's Hotel in Cheltenham, evidently on a short honeymoon. Sarah's father, John Gaskin Thomas, was a well-known businessman in Torquay, trading as a poulterer and fishmonger. He was also a deacon of the Upton Vale Baptist Chapel and active in the Liberal Party's County Committee.



Emily Ravesteyn

Jacob's desire to enhance his background is also reflected in a watercolour he owned and later bequeathed, bearing the caption '*Castle Ravesteyn, Heenvliet, 1749*'. The work, signed by W.D. MacBeth and dedicated to 'Jacob Ravesteyn Esqr M.S.P.H.', depicts a ruined castle near Rotterdam and implies a connection between the Ravesteyn name and this site, or even that it was the family's ancestral home. There is no evidence for such a connection, but Jacob evidently found the idea appealing. MacBeth's image was almost identical to a copper engraving by Cornelis Pronk dating from about a century earlier. Jacob may have purchased the print during a visit to the Netherlands. The letters M.S.P.H. refer to Jacob's membership of the Society of Public Health, relevant at a time when hotels were subject to increasingly strict hygiene regulations under the Public Health Act.



William Duncanson MacBeth (1857–1917), whose surname was originally MacBeath, was an acquaintance of Jacob's. He acted as a witness when Jacob drew up his will in 1891.

MacBeth was an amateur artist but earned his living as a commercial traveller, probably in the insurance business. Born in Scotland and later living in Bristol, he was, at the age of sixteen, one of the founders and first

players of the football club that would later become famous as Glasgow Rangers. Although his life ended in relative obscurity,



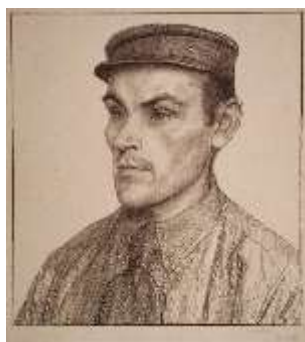
W.D. McBeth



Cornelis Pronk

Rangers supporters honoured him in 2010 with a new gravestone and inducted him into the club's Hall of Fame.

According to letters from his nephew Dirk, Jacob maintained contact with his Dutch family even after his second marriage. 'Jacob Ravestein has visited Holland several times with his wife,' Dirk wrote. A court report from June 1889, for example, notes that Jacob was unable to appear as a witness owing to his stay in Holland. Travel at the time involved a combination of train and steamship, probably departing from Southampton. 'Usually his wife stayed in The Hague, while he visited the



Janus Ravestein by Jan Veth

family; he also visited Bussum with his second wife,' Dirk added. In Bussum lived his cousin Adrianus (also Janus) Ravestein, who resided there from at least 1890 until 1920. Adrianus worked as a carpenter and cheese dealer and carried out carpentry work for the artist Jan Veth, who made his portrait in 1896.

These visits were brief, however, and Jacob integrated fully into his adopted country. Together with his brothers-in-law he was active in the Torquay Licensed Victuallers' Protection Society, serving for several years on its committee. From 1884 onwards he regularly attended meetings of the local Conservative Party, rather than the Liberal Party favoured by his father-in-law. He dined annually with the Torquay Athletic Club and sponsored prize-givings for the Rifle Volunteers with boxes of cigars. He was also a member

of Torquay's Improvement Committee, which advised the local authorities on ways to enhance the town's appeal. In 1886, ten years after his first marriage, Jacob applied for British citizenship. Under the Naturalization Act of 1870 this was permitted after five years' residence, provided the applicant intended to remain in the United Kingdom. Supporting declarations were provided by his grocer and neighbour John Dendle, his father-in-law Thomas, Charles Henry Clode, Frank Baigeut and Jaber Ebenezer Bovey. On 20 August Jacob swore allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Victoria. During the Queen's Golden Jubilee the following year, Jacob decorated the hotel with the rose, shamrock and thistle—the symbols of England, Ireland and Scotland—accompanied by the fitting word 'Union'.

Despite his naturalization, Jacob was still regarded by some as a foreigner. A court report as late as November 1888 referred to him as 'a Dutchman'. There was some justification for this perception: the three men who assaulted Jacob had reportedly been called 'English swine' by him.

Jacob's second marriage produced no surviving children. In December 1889 Sarah gave birth to a stillborn child. While she undoubtedly played a significant role in caring for the children from Jacob's first marriage, she also worked in the hotel. Personnel advertisements soon stated that applicants should apply to 'Mrs Ravesteyn'. Every few years a new cook was required, and there were frequent vacancies for an under-housemaid, a barmaid, an ostler, or 'a lad with good character for the billiard room and to make himself generally useful'. The

division of labour between male and female staff was clearly defined. Census records from 1881 and 1891 show six and eight resident staff respectively, including barmaids, domestic servants, a porter, a cook and a billiard marker.

A trade card from the 1890s lists the establishment as *The Union Commercial and Family Hotel*. It advertises the hotel as the most central in Torquay, with spacious coffee rooms and a



good billiard room. J. Ravesteyn is named as proprietor, and the card notes that additional rooms have been added to the hotel. This expansion took place in 1889,

when the building was 'considerably enlarged'. The hotel also offered omnibuses to all trains, transporting guests to and from the railway station. Photographs from the period show numerous horse-drawn vehicles in the street. In 1883 a second-hand hotel coach was advertised for sale, and in 1887 Ravesteyn sought a 'driver for pair horses, omnibus'. In addition to horses, the Ravesteyn family owned a dog. On one occasion Jacob was summoned to court after the dog bit a boy, the son of the barber Treeby who lived diagonally opposite at number 11. The case ended with a warning, after Jacob explained that the dog had been startled.

The local Licensed Victuallers' Association defended the interests of publicans and the right to consume alcohol,

opposing government interference and the temperance movement, which campaigned against excessive drinking and in favour of restrictions. At the association's annual banquet in 1889 one speaker mocked the movement, declaring that 'the Englishman was capable of holding his own in the face of the people of the earth, and, therefore, it was an utter fallacy for these fanatics to cry out that the consumption of beer and wine was damaging to the physique of the nation'¹². Yet there was cause for concern even in Torquay. From time to time alcohol flowed freely in and around the Union Hotel. Court reports in the local newspapers paint a vivid picture of incidents involving intoxicated patrons who, when refused further drink, became abusive or violent. In many cases the presiding magistrate bore the apt name Drinkwater.

The young Harry Pridham was fined after attempting to fight Jacob when the latter refused to readmit him because of his drunkenness. Fisherman Thomas Mudge appeared in court in 1884 after a dispute with Jacob; while intoxicated, Mudge had allegedly damaged the hotel door with his fish cart and physically threatened Jacob when challenged. He was fined £8. In the same year a thief was convicted of stealing three coats, one of which had been pawned; Jacob's testimony proved decisive. In another case Jacob testified on behalf of a defendant, stating that a man had been wrongly accused of drunkenness. Fish seller George Pile smashed a pane of glass in the hotel door with his fist after being removed from the bar and was sentenced to two weeks' imprisonment. In 1886 Jacob again brought charges against an intoxicated fisherman, James

Johns, who entered the hotel drunk, unsuccessfully attempted to order beer and refused to leave. As a repeat offender, Johns was fined £1. On rare occasions the offender was a woman, such as Annie Terry, described as ‘a young woman of ill fame’, who had previous convictions. Two years later another altercation ended in court; although the defendants claimed that Jacob had started the quarrel and insulted them, all three were sentenced to three weeks’ imprisonment. In 1892 the pattern repeated itself when painter John Symonds received a week in prison for behaving abusively towards Jacob. John Green was arrested after attempting to cash a forged cheque at the hotel; he was too drunk to understand the charge at the time of his arrest, but later pleaded guilty.

Retirement in Bournemouth

In December 1897, Ravesteyn left the hotel, and for a time its day-to-day management was taken over by Mr and Mrs Gilley¹³. James Broad Gilley entered into a lease with a term of fifty years, but as early as August 1898 he was succeeded by Mr W. R. Harding. After him, James and Rosina Sweet took over the management, at least between 1901 and 1911.

A photograph sent to relatives in the Netherlands has been preserved, on which Jacob wrote the address “Castle Mount.”



This was the name of a house at 7 Castle Road, not far from the hotel. At the time of the 1891 census, the retired parents of Jacob's second wife were living there. They had

probably purchased the house in 1887 from R. D. Renwick, who offered it for sale at auction that year. The house contained six bedrooms. According to Margaret Tapping, who lived there from 1968 until around 2000, it was originally a Victorian villa built around 1870. Much later, and until the late 1980s, Castle Mount — like many houses in Torquay — also served as a hotel.



Sarah's father, John Gaskin Thomas, died there in 1896 at the age of seventy, a few months after celebrating fifty years of marriage. It is possible that Jacob Ravesteyn and his wife then lived for some time with her mother, perhaps between leaving the Union Hotel in 1897 and 1899. From that year onwards, the family lived at Marlborough House, 4 The Birklands in Torquay, now 519 Babbacombe Road. There, in 1899, their daughter Emily died at the age of nineteen. According to her death certificate, the cause was "phthisis exhaustion" — tuberculosis. The obituary expresses resignation:

*God has called thee home, my child,
Because He thought it best;
Few have been thy years on earth,
But long will be thy rest.*



At the time of the 1901 census, Jacob and his second wife were living at the boarding house *Tralee* on St Michael's Road in Bournemouth, with a certain William Mattock listed as "boarding house keeper." Jacob is again described as a "retired hotel proprietor." Their son Herman Jacob was probably living in London in 1901. The census records a twenty-four-year-old Harry Ravesteyn, born in Ashburton, Devon, not far from

Torquay, living in St James's, Westminster, London. Although Herman Jacob — also known as Harry — was only twenty-two in 1901, census data are not always precise. Harry was working as a draper's assistant in the textile trade. William Andrew (also known as Bill) was then living with his uncle Joseph and aunt Edith Risdon in Exeter.

In the letters of Dirk Ravestein, it is stated that one of the two sons was killed in the Boer War (1899–1902), and that the other also died young. This turns out not to be entirely accurate. In 1899–1900, William completed a first-aid course in Bath. He then volunteered as Private Ravesteyn with the St John Ambulance Brigade to serve in the Boer War in South Africa, and returned alive, having been promoted to sergeant and awarded medals. Between August 1900 and March 1901 he was stationed at hospitals in Wynberg near Cape Town and later in Pretoria. His name is still listed on a commemorative plaque for Boer War servicemen in the Guildhall in Bath. Although the Netherlands was officially neutral during the war, many Dutch citizens sympathised with the Boers and their leader Paul Kruger, the British opponents in the conflict. Many Boers were of Dutch descent and spoke Afrikaans, a language closely related to Dutch. William's Dutch background posed no obstacle to his volunteering.

On the gravestone of his mother in Torquay cemetery, it is recorded that Harry died on 9 August 1906 in Cradock, South Africa, several years after the end of the Boer War. There was therefore no connection with the war. Harry did not travel to South Africa until 10 September 1904, when he sailed from

PRIVATE W. R. RAVESTEYN.

Below we give a portrait of Private W. R. Ravesteyn, of the St. John Ambulance Brigade, of whose military career the following notes will be of interest :—

No. 1560 Pte. W. R. Ravesteyn, Bath City Division St. John Ambulance Brigade, joined June 11th, 1900, volunteered for service in South Africa early in August, 1900, left England August 30th, was attached to the R.A.M.C. at the No. 1 General Hospital, Wynberg, at first, and afterwards to the No. 7 General Hospital, Pretoria. Returned to England March 27, 1901.



Photo by)

(W. G. Lewis.

PRIVATE W. A. RAVESTEYN.

Southampton to Algoa Bay near Port Elizabeth aboard the *SS Braemar Castle*, several hundred kilometres south of Cradock. His death certificate lists his occupation as “student” and the



cause of death as “consumption” — tuberculosis — the same disease that had claimed his mother and his sister Emily. Harry died at the Queen’s Central Hospital in Cradock and was buried at the

Municipal Cemetery on Deary Road in that town.

Two years after his brother’s death, William emigrated to Canada in 1908. There he was usually known as Bill and went on to serve for more than ten years in paramedical roles in the Canadian Army, including as a medical sergeant and first-aid instructor. After the loss of two of Jacob’s children, the emigration of his eldest son meant that Jacob spent the final years of his life without any of his children nearby.

Because the photograph on which Jacob wrote the address Castle Mount was taken in Bournemouth, it is also possible that after moving there, the Ravestejns spent part of the year at the house in Torquay with Mrs Thomas. An incident in 1908 suggests yet another possibility. Near the Town Hall — and thus close to the Union Hotel — Jacob was struck by Dr Carver while crossing the street. The doctor was able to administer first aid immediately. According to a newspaper

report, the injured Jacob, with a severely bruised right arm and face, was taken by taxi “to his home in Morgan Avenue.”

Jacob Ravesteyn died on 28 March 1910 in Bournemouth, from the effects of heart disease. At the time, he was still living on St Michael’s Road, though the address *Beechwood* is also mentioned in the death record, making it unclear whether he was still residing at the boarding house Tralee. Jacob was buried at Wimborne Road Cemetery in Bournemouth. His estate was initially left to his widow and, after her death, to his son. Its value amounted to £6,334 — roughly equivalent to one million euros today. From the time of Jacob’s death, his son received an annual allowance of £100. Sarah died on 19 April 1936 on Westby Road in Boscombe, Bournemouth. Her estate then amounted to £6,714. In 1939, the Union Hotel was managed by Carr & Quick Ltd. Throughout those years, the hotel remained the property of Jacob’s heirs — first his widow and ultimately his son Bill.

On the enlistment form that Bill completed in 1918 for the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force, he declared that he had no surviving family, although his stepmother was still alive at that time. A few years later, in 1922, he married and had one daughter, Audrey. After his military career, Bill worked for Jeffrey Drug Store in Calgary and for the Alberta National Drug Company. In addition, he devoted more than fifty years to voluntary service with St John Ambulance¹⁴.

[illegible]

Union Hotel, Torquay

Opening
on
Saturday
Morning

**THE
'DUTCH'
BAR**

A new and attractive lounge
portrayed in the Dutch style

By John E. Sand, of Paignton. Murals by Fox



The End of the Hotel

Eventually, in 1946, Bill put the hotel up for sale¹⁵. By then he was almost seventy years old and had been living in Canada for nearly forty years. The auction catalogue shows that the original lease was still in force. The agreement concluded in December 1897 was due to expire at the end of 1947, and the annual rent had meanwhile risen to £300. In the end, the auction did not take place. Bill sold the hotel a few days beforehand in a private sale for £32,810. He died in 1953, his wife in 1956.

At the time of its sale in 1946, the hotel had three bars. The lounge bar was located in the entrance hall, alongside a Saloon Bar and a Gents' Bar. There was a dining room seating forty-five guests, as well as a lounge and two sitting rooms. The hotel contained thirty bedrooms, twenty-three for guests and seven for staff. There were, incidentally, only two bathrooms. In addition, the hotel had a cellar, storage rooms and a garage with space for fifteen cars.

In May 1950, a new bar opened in the hotel, probably newly refurbished, with a name that seemed to refer to its former owner: "the Dutch Bar." In 1954, the hotel was sold again by Herbert Clifford, this time to Arthur Henry Mogford. In February 1963, after 132 years, the history of the hotel came to an end. It was demolished, and a retail building rose on its site.



Jacob's grave in Bournemouth

A Mysterious Gentleman

Although the correspondence with the London solicitors does not explicitly reveal who was searching for proof of a marriage between the Earl St Maur and Rosina Swan, other sources make it clear that it was the illegitimate son, Harold. His interest was obvious: proof of a lawful marriage between his parents would make him the heir to the title once held by his grandfather, the Duke of Somerset. Sir John Colville writes in his book that Harold made “futile efforts to convince himself and others that Ferdy and Rosina had been secretly married somewhere in Devonshire.”¹⁶ Another rumour suggested that the marriage had taken place in Easton-in-Gordano, near Bristol.

In 1923, the search gained new momentum following the death of the fifteenth Duke of Somerset. The duke and his brother had no sons, leaving four distant cousins to claim the title. Harold St Maur also submitted a petition in February 1925 to a committee of the House of Lords, requesting recognition of his claim. *The Times* of 26 March 1925 reported that proof of the marriage had still not been found¹⁷. A solicitor acting on Harold’s behalf stated that he had “good hope that he would be ultimately successful in proving that his father and mother were legally married before his birth.” That solicitor was from Church, Rackham & Co., the same firm that had placed the advertisement in the *Utrechtsch Nieuwsblad* six months earlier.

The proof was never found, and to this day the title of Duke of Somerset has continued to pass along another branch of the family. Harold died in 1927.

The question remains how Jacob rose from clog maker to hotel proprietor. Dirk Ravestein's account is that he was "placed in a hotel" by the Earl St Maur, though what this precisely meant remains unclear. Within the St Maur family, a slightly different story circulated, recorded in Brian Masters's 1975 book *The Dukes*. According to this version, Lord Henry Thynne — married to one of St Maur's sisters — had paid Jacob hush money. Masters places this story against the background of Harold St Maur's quest for evidence of his parents' marriage:

"Harold St Maur came of age and began to wonder about his parents. Could they have been married? He spent much of his fortune and a good deal of time trying to track down a marriage certificate. Years passed without success, until one day a man turned up who said, yes the Earl St Maur and Rosa Swann had been married, and he had moreover been a witness. Henry Thynne was alarmed. It would not serve his interest that Harold St Maur should be proved the rightful Duke of Somerset. The mysterious gentleman was hustled away, and later that year opened a shop in Torquay with money he did not have; it was all very suspect. Word got out that Thynne had seen to it the marriage certificate should be destroyed."¹⁸

Although Masters does not name the individual, it is clear that the "mysterious gentleman" — an alleged witness with a business in Torquay — can only have been Jacob Ravesteyn.

While the story may contain a kernel of truth, the dates cited by Masters are demonstrably incorrect. When Jacob first opened a business in Torquay in 1876, Harold St Maur was only seven years old and certainly not yet spending large portions of his fortune searching for proof of his parents' marriage.

There is, however, another possible explanation. Within the family of Jacob's first wife, Jane Risdon, we encounter several hotel proprietors. Her brother Joseph Risdon was innkeeper of the Exeter Hotel and later owner of the Victory Inn in Exeter. Her brother-in-law George Kentisbeer ran the Burton Ale House, while her younger sister Ann Risdon was hotel keeper of the Hesketh Arms on Meadfoot Lane. Another sister,



Joseph Risdon, his wife Edith, Nellie Parnacott and an unknown lady.

Charlotte Risdon, also lived there. The Exeter Hotel stood almost next door to the Union Hotel. Brother and sister appear to have maintained close ties:

Joseph lived for a time at the Union

Hotel, and later Jacob's son William stayed with his uncle Joseph in Exeter. Jacob's career may thus have owed more to the enterprising Risdon family than to the wealthy Seymour family. It is quite possible that his brother-in-law Joseph Risdon helped set his children on their way financially.

It is likely that Jacob Ravesteyn himself never knew that he might have played a role in an important inheritance dispute. At the time of the correspondence, he had already been dead for more than ten years. His second wife was still alive in 1924, and the London solicitors were in contact with her, but she too was unable to advance the investigation. Contacts with “Mrs Kentisbeer” and “Mr Risdon” — Jacob’s sister-in-law and brother-in-law — likewise yielded nothing. In one of their letters to Dirk Ravestein, the solicitors wrote: “Mr Ravestein [...] repeatedly stated to his second wife (who is still living) that he was present at the marriage. Mrs Ravestein cannot remember where it took place.” And that is just as well: had she been able to provide useful information, the advertisement in the *Utrechtsch Nieuwsblad* would never have appeared — and this story would not have been written.

At the sale of the hotel, the name Ravesteyn was heard in Torquay for the final time, more than seventy-five years after Jacob had settled there. Today, only the graves of his wife Jane and his daughter Emily remain as tangible reminders of this chapter in the sometimes dramatic history of the family. Both women died young of tuberculosis, as did Harry. It is also a story of people often left to fend for themselves, compelled or determined to find their own path. Jacob spent his early years with his grandparents and may never have known who his father was. His son Bill lost his mother at the age of five, was sent to boarding school as a boy, and found himself at twenty-three in a war far from home. In the final years of his life, Jacob was prosperous and retired from the age of fifty-three,

yet had already lost three close family members at a young age and had only one son left — on the other side of the ocean.

It may sound exotic that the three children of a boy from Harmelen ultimately came to be buried on three different continents. Above all, it underlines that Jacob's life story contained not only high points, but many profound lows.

And still many questions remain. What was the origin of the rumours about the alleged marriage? Was it merely Harold's desire for an aristocratic title? If so, why would Jacob have repeatedly told his second wife that he had been a witness to the marriage? Did he, as an illegitimate son himself, feel a kinship with the fate of Harold St Maur? And then there are the questions surrounding Jacob's own origins. Who was his father, and why did Jacob have it recorded at his second marriage that his father had been a military officer? Where did the names William and James come from, which Jacob gave as his father's name on different occasions? His eldest son was even named William. Did Jacob truly believe that his family name was connected to the ruin of Ravesteyn near Heenvliet? And perhaps the greatest mystery of all: how did he come by his military medals? Was his service record lost or destroyed by some strange twist of fate? Or did Jacob so carefully cultivate his image — including a fictitious military career — that he acquired the medals himself during one of his journeys to the Netherlands?

These are questions that will most likely remain unanswered, and they confirm what Brian Masters wrote: in the end, Jacob Ravesteyn was indeed a mysterious gentleman.



Notes

¹ Joe A.A. Silmon-Monerri, *The secret life of Earl St. Maur (1835-1869) – Was he my greatgrandfather*, Victoria, 2010 and Public Record Office, HO45/9443/67001.

² Brian Masters, *The Dukes. The Origins, Ennoblement and History of Twenty-six Families*, London (Pimlico) 2001 (fully revised and updated, 1st edition 1975), p. 56.

³ In the book *Dwalen over de Boompjes en omgeving* by Herman Romer (Rotterdam, 2001), mention is made of several hotels that were located on the Boompjes in the 19th century. According to the author, the New Bath Hotel and the Grand Hôtel des Pays-Bas were clearly the most renowned among them. “High-ranking dignitaries, including members of royalty, regularly stayed there,” Romer writes. The Pays-Bas closed its doors permanently in 1858. The hotel where Count St. Maur stayed and where Jacob worked was therefore most likely the New Bath Hotel. The official Rotterdam city directory of that time (*Naamlijst volgens de wijken der stad Rotterdam 1866–67*) seems to confirm this assumption: it lists only one hotel on the Boompjes, the New Bath Hotel at Boompjes 57.

⁴ John Colville, *Strange Inheritance*, Salisbury (Michael Russell) 1983.

⁵ Charles J.B. Williams, M.D. F.R.S., *Authentic Narrative of the case of the late Earl St. Maur*, London (Longmans, Green, and Co) 1870.

⁶ *Letters of Lord St. Maur and Lord Edward St. Maur 1846 to 1869*, London (Printed for private circulation) 1888, p. 381.

⁷ *Letters of Lord St. Maur and Lord Edward St. Maur 1846 to 1869*, London (Printed for private circulation) 1888, p. 395.

⁸ Joe A.A. Silmon-Monerri, *The secret life of Earl St. Maur (1835-1869) – Was he my greatgrandfather*, Victoria, 2010, p. 452.

⁹ William White, *History, gazetteer and directory of the county of Devon*, Sheffield/London 1878-9, p. 814.

¹⁰ Mike Holgate, *Images of England: Torquay*, pocket edition 2005, p. 14.

¹¹ Arthur Charles Ellis, *An historical survey of Torquay, from the earliest times, as illustrated by finds in Kent's Cavern, down to the present time*, Torquay no year (around. 1930), p. 316-317.

¹² *Western Morning News*, 11 October 1889, p. 8.

¹³ *Torquay Directory*, 1897.

¹⁴ A short biography of William Andrew Ravesteyn can be found in: Lavonne Browarny, *A friend in need. St. John Ambulance in Calgary*, Calgary 1975, p. 57-59.

¹⁵ *Torquay Times*, 5 jul 1946.

¹⁶ John Colville, *Strange Inheritance*, Salisbury (Michael Russell) 1983, p. 88.

¹⁷ 'House of Lords. Committee for privileges. The Dukedom of Somerset', in: *The Times*, 26 March 1925 .

¹⁸ Brian Masters, *The Dukes. The Origins, Ennoblement and History of Twenty-six Families*, London (Pimlico) 2001 (fully revised and updated, 1st edition 1975), p. 56.

Appendix 1

The letters

25 November 1924

A 50 Pound Sterling

reward shall be paid for witnesses or inquiries concerning the marriage of an Englishwoman named ROSINA (or ROSA) ELISABETH SWAN in the year 1866 and to which one of the witnesses probably was a man named Ravesteyn. The Englishwoman was seventeen years old at the time and she married an Englishman. [The names of] witnesses or any other inquiries concerning this marriage must be sent to the gentlemen CHURCH BACHHAM & co 46 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London W.C. 2. England.



25 November 1924

Groenekan, Utrecht (Holland)

Dear Sirs,

In reply to your advertisement in the Utr. Nieuwsblad of November 25th 1924, in which inquiries are being asked concerning a man named Ravestein, living in England, who was present at a certain wedding a witness, I take the liberty of bringing to your attention that: Jacob Ravestein, a hotelkeeper who has lived in Torquay and has died a few years ago, leaving behind (a daughter?) [...]. Of this Ravestein, a cousin of mine, very probably some handwritten documents and letters are still existing, into which an investigation can be started easily. Hoping this will all lead to finding the Ravesteyn you are referring to, I sign, yours sincerely,

your servant

D. Ravestein

Groenekan near Utrecht

Telegrams: Christlike Enk. Kerk
Telephones: Welhaven 257.

CHURCH BACKMAN & CO

111 WASHINGTON
D.C. 20001

46, Lincoln's Inn Fields,
London, W.C.2.

28th November 1924

Dear Sir,

We are much obliged for your letter of the 25th inst.

The Jacob Ravestein whom you mention is the same person that we understand was a witness to the marriage of Rosina or Rosa Elisabeth Swan. We shall be obliged if you will make enquiry of his relations to know whether or not they have any documents in their possession relating to the Earl of St. Maur in whose service Jacob Ravestein was in the years 1864 to (we think) 1869.

Yours faithfully,

John Adamson

D. Ravestein, Esq.,
Groenekan
Nr. Utrecht,
Holland.

Telegrams, Christchurch, N.Z. 267.
Telegrams, Welbore 267.

CHURCH HACKMAN & CO

11, MARK LANE,
LONDON, E.C. 3.

46, Lincoln's Inn Fields,
London, W.C. 2.

1st December 1924

Dear Sir,

With further reference to your letter of us of the
25th November -

Will you please endeavour to ascertain and let us
know where Mr. Jacob Ravenstein's daughter is now living.

Can you tell us when he first went to live at Torquay,
and whether or not after he went to Torquay he returned to
Holland either alone or with anyone else.

We are, as you will see from our Advertisement in
"The Utrechtsch Nieuwsblad" endeavouring to find evidence of
the Marriage of Rosina (or Rosa) Elizabeth Swan. The
gentleman whom she married was Edward Adolphus Ferdinand
commonly called Earl St. Maur
St. Maur. The late Mr. Jacob Ravenstein was in the service
of Earl St. Maur and repeatedly stated to his second wife
(who is still living) that he was present at the marriage.
Mrs. Ravenstein cannot remember where it took place. We
know that at about the time 1864-1868 the parties were
travelling in Holland. The reward we are offering will be
paid for Evidence of the Marriage. If such evidence is

Telegrams, Greenwich: Salt. Kenton.
Telephone, New York: 257.

CHURCH BARNHAM & CO

11, DORSET ST.,
LONDON, W.1.

48, Lincoln's Inn Fields,
London, W.C.2.

- 2 -

1/12/24

sufficient to establish the legality of the marriage in an English Court such reward will be much increased.

We must ask you please to treat this letter in a confidential manner and not to disclose any of the contents of it to the Press. Your reasonable expenses we ^{will} pay.

Will you please get into touch with Mr. Jacob Ravestein's relations and obtain all the particulars you can, and let us hear from you as soon as possible. If you can obtain from them any documents bearing on the matter please to do and let us have them.

Yours faithfully,

Church Barnham & Co.

D. Ravestein, Esq.,
Groenekan,
Near Utrecht,
Holland.

2 December 1924

Groenekan near Utrecht (Holland)

Dear Sirs,

In reply to your letter of 28 November 1924, in which you ask for some inquiries concerning Jacob Ravestein, we hereby send you the most extensive inquiries that we have at this moment. To start with some details from his life. After having had a number of jobs, he took up work as a waiter in an hotel on the Boompjes in Rotterdam. There he met an Englishman, who was very wealthy, in whose service he started to travel; after visiting several countries, this man set him up with a position in an hotel in Torquay. From Torquay we were sent a few postcards which are still in our possession. We also have a portrait of this Jacob Ravestein, on which he wrote his address at the time, which is:

J. Ravesteyn Esqr.
Castle Mount
Castle Road
Torquay England

And we also still have a card of the hotel in Torquay, which literally says: The Union Commercial and Family Hotel Torquay etc.

We take the liberty of keeping the original pieces. We also suppose to find out more details concerning this Jacob Ravestein with other relatives, the time was however too short to make further inquiries.

Opmerken bij Utrecht
(Holland)
2 December 1924

Wetende Heeren

Naar aanleiding van uw
schrijven van 1.1.188 November 1924,
waarin u vraagt om eenige inlichtingen
betreffende de beurt te Jacob
Ravestein,

(Zij zeggen alleen wat de uitgaande
breidte in lichtingen trekomen, die
we bezitten op het bezitten)

Om te beginnen eenige beurt
bijzon verbaan uit zijn beurt.

Na eenige ambachten gebaat te
hebben, kwam hij als kelner in een
hotel aan de boomrijen te Rotterdam.

Daar heeft hij kennis aan een beurt

Daar ontmoette hij een jehere in
Engelschman, welke zeer rijke was, met
aanst van

Deze beurt is hij toen medegegaan en
hebben samen verschillende landen
te hebben is hij door de
Indisch recht. Toen deze beurt eenden beurt
was heeft deze Jacob Ravestein in een
hotel gezet te Torquay.

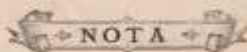
Van uit Torquay hebben we eenig

**D. RAVESTEIN,
GROENEKAN.**

HANDEL IN KOLONIALE-
EN GRUTTERSWAREN
WIJNEN EN LIKEUREN

GROENEKAN,

192



VOOR

van **D. RAVESTEIN.**

ge aanzichtten bezigt heeft gedgegeven
dat hij in ons bezit zijn
foto is in ons bezit het portret
van deze Jacob Ravestein, waarop
hij met zijn hand het toenmalige
paars versierde heeft, het welke
lijkt:

J. Ravestein Esq.
Castle Ground
Castle Road

Torquay, Engeland

Dan is nog in ons bezit een
kaartje uit het hotel de Torquay
het welke woontelijke lijd

The Union Commercial
and Family Hotel
Torquay etc.

De originele foto's zijn wij
nog in ons bezit te hebben.
Wij vermoeden wij bij andere
familie leden nog andere bijzondere
stukken te vinden welke op deze Jacob
Ravestein betrekking hebben, de
tijd zal echter te spoed om nader
oplichtingen in te winnen

6 December 1924

Groenekan

Dear Sirs,

We received your letter shortly after our letter was sent. We have been making inquiries first to Utrecht Kockengen and then to Bussum. Now we can state for certain that Jacob Ravestein married twice while from the first marriage three children were born, namely two boys and a girl. Of the sons fell in the Transvaal Boer War, also the other died young. The girl died in 1899 of whom an obituary notice is still in our possession, saying: We haven't been able to find any information concerning the wedding, and it is very doubtful if any information is available. However, we will continue with our investigation. Jacob Ravestein and his wife visited Holland several times, most of the time his wife stayed in The Hague, while he visited relatives. With his second wife he visited Bussum. Now we also have in our possession a portrait of [his first wife](#) and [daughter](#) . We hope these inquiries have been valuable for you. Awaiting your reply, we sign

D. Ravestein

*Deze twee personen zijn in de
X Thien hebben toe toe in ons land het
menige is in 1899 overleden*
waaraan de rouwkaart nog in ons
bezit is, welke luidt: ...

Over gegevens omtrent het be-
doelde huwelijk hebben we nog
niets kunnen vinden, en het
is ook zeer twyfelachtig dat
er eenige gegevens oien aan-
gaande zijn. Ichtig zal het
inderzijde nog voortgezet worden.

Jacob Ravestijn is meermalen
met zijn vrouw in Holland ge-
weest, meestal bleef zijn vrouw
in Den Haag, terwijl hijzelf de
familie bezocht, ook is hij met
zijn tweede vrouw wel eens in
Bassam geweest. X

We hopen dat ~~de~~ deze
inlichtingen nog waardevol
zullen zijn. In afwachting tekenen

Telegrams, "Churchills, 20th, London."
Telephone, Holland 257.

CHURCH, RACKHAM & CO

INCORPORATED IN
ENGLAND
H. A. RACKHAM
HOLLAND BUILDING

40, Lincoln's Inn Fields,
London, W.C.2.

8th December 1934

Dear Sir,

We are obliged for your letter, and shall be glad if you will please make enquiry of the late Mr. J. Ravestein's relations to know whether or not they can give us information with reference to the marriage of Henri St. Maur with Miss Gwyn. Mrs. Ravestein informs us that her late husband on many occasions told her that he was present at the marriage. It is most important to our Client to obtain evidence, and we trust that you will do your utmost to help us in the matter.

As we have already informed you, we will pay your reasonable expenses.

Yours faithfully,

Fluoresda Smith

D. Ravestein, Esq.,
Groenekan,
Nr. Utrecht,
Holland.

Telegram: Churchills Hall, London.
Telephone: Holborn 257.

CHURCH RACKHAM & CO

A. J. HARRIS
DONALD MACLEAN

46, Lincoln's Inn Fields,
London, W.C.2.

12th December 1924

Dear Sir,

We are much obliged for the
information contained in your letter
of the 6th inst. Will you please
let us know the year in which Jacob
Ravestein first met Earl St. Maur in
Rotterdam.

Yours faithfully,

Church Rackham & Co

D. Ravestein, Esq.,
Groenekan,
Nr. Utrecht,
Holland.

16 December 1924

To the Right Honourable Sir, the Registrar at the City Hall of
Rotterdam

Groenekan near Utrecht

16 December 1924

Your Honour,

Hereby I, the undersigned, politely and urgently request you to be so kind, to give from public records information concerning the departure of a certain Jacob Ravestein, a waiter in one of the hotels on the Boompjes in Rotterdam. This Jacob Ravestein has probably left Rotterdam between 1860 and 1870 (possibly a little earlier) in the service of an Englishman Earl St. Maur. For us it is very important to know the exact year or date of departure. We would like to receive answer by return concerning the costs of this inquiry and sign, yours sincerely,

D. Ravestein

Groenekan near Utrecht

Not traceable without further information.

Rotterdam 18/12/1924

10^e in prijs
Aan
de Edelachtbare Heer
Ambtenaar van een Burger-
lijken Stand, Stads huis
te Rotterdam

Groenekan bij Utrecht
16 December 1924

Edelachtbare Heer

Bij deze verzocht ondergetee-
kende U te beëdfen dringende, of
U zoo goed godt willen zijn, uit de
Burgertijke Stand in Uchttingen te
willen geven om trent het verkeke
van zekere Jacob Raverstein, van
berdop kelner in één der hotels
aan de Moompjes te Rotterdam.

Deze Jacob Raverstein is in de
jaren 1860 tot 1870 (het kon wezen
nog iets eerder) uit Rotterdam
vertrokken, in dienst van een

Engelschman Graaf St. Maur

Het is er ons geer veel aan
gelegen, het juiste jaar of da-
tuum van vertrek te weten.

Gaarne zien we per om-
gaande tegemoet, welke de
kosten van dat onderzocht zul-
len zijn en beekenen met de
meeste hoogachting

Huw. Adv.

D. Ravenstein
Groenekan bij Albrecht

Zonder nadere gezamen-
lijk op te sporen -

R. H. 12/12/1904



26 December 1924)

Your Honour,

In reaction to your reply of last [...] December in which you asked us for further information, we have been investigating and have found some additional information. Jacob Ravestein, born in Harmelen on June 14th 1844, left from Woerden to Utrecht on July 25th 1863, and left from Utrecht to Rotterdam on January 23 1866. We hope with this lead, you can now state on which date Jacob Ravestein left Rotterdam.

Yours sincerely,
your servant
D. Ravestein

Groenendaal bij Utrecht
16 Dec. 1868

Edeleachtbare Heer

Naas aanleuning van den
and word op ons schrijven van
h. h. Dec. waarin ik vraag om
nadere inlichtingen, zijne wij-
ze op dit gewest en hebben nog
eenige gegevens kunnen verschaffen

Salom Raverstein, geboren
te Hammelen den 14 Juli 1844, is
vertrokken den 21 Juli 1863 uit
Horsens naar Utrecht, wederom
vertrokken uit Utrecht den 23
Januari 1866 naar Rotterdam

~~Ant 10.20 11 post 1/2~~

Wij hopen dat te met deze
draad in handen, thans kunt
samenvoegen, op welke datum
Jacob Ravestein uit Rotterdam
is vertrokken

Met de meest te hoogachting
Uw dw. dienaar

D. Ravestein
Gloerikamp bij Utrecht

Telegrams, Chubb & Co. Ltd. London.

Telephone, Holborn 257.

CHURCH RACKHAM & CO

A. J. HARRISOTT.
DONALD MACLEAN.

46, Lincoln's Inn Fields,
London, W.C.2.

31st December 1924

Dear Sir,

Will you please let us have an
early reply to our letter of the 12th
inst.

Yours faithfully,

Church Rackham & Co.

D. Ravestein, Esq.

3 January 1925

To The registry office City Hall Rotterdam

Groenekan near Utrecht

Your Honour,

Because we are still awaiting your reply to our recent letter we take the liberty of asking why we haven't received a reply. Is it because the amount of money we sent was too small?

Therefore we hereby send you another 40 cents in postage stamps, so the total amount we have sent is now 70 cents. If the amount is still too small, we will send you the missing amount afterwards. As you know our question was on what date, Jacob Ravestein, coming from Utrecht January 23rd 1866, left the city of Rotterdam. We repeat our question because it is possible our previous letter got lost. We politely request to receive a reply as soon as possible, because the matter is very urgent. We therefore hope you will find this person in your register and sign, yours sincerely,

your servant,

D. Ravestein

Groenekan near Utrecht

Does not appear in the registers of this municipality.

Dfl. 0,50 in postage stamps returned.

aan
het bevelings Bureau
Melgond Stadhuys
Batterdam
aan de Roemeen bij Elbrecht
13 Jan. 1925
Edelachtbare Heer

Daar wij nog steeds antwoord
wachten de zijn op ons schrijven
van Laatsleden, zijn wij zoo
vrij thans nog eens te vragen
om welke reden soms antwoord
weg bleef. Is het soms omdat
er te klein bedrag is ingezonden
zoo geraden wij te hielden nog
40 cents aan postzegels, wat
met de vorige maal mee thans

So certo bedraagt. So het bedrag
echter nog te klein, zoo zullen
wij te wederhand het ontbrekende
wel toezien den.

Zoodat ik weet was onze naam
de vorige maal, de datum van
vertrek uit Rotterdam van
Jacob Raverbin, gekomen
van Utrecht den 23 Januari
1866, dit herhalen wij hier
even, daar 't kon gebeuren dat
de vorige brief verloren was
gegaan.

Wij verzoeken ik beleeft, zoo
spoedig mogelijke antwoord te
geven, daar de zaak zeer
dringend is. Wij hopen dat ik
bedoelde persoon in Uwe re-
gisters vinden kunt, en

Afkenen met
de meeste hoogachting

Uw dw. dienaar

J. Ravenstein

Groenekan bij Utrecht.
—



Telegrams, Churchills, Holb. London.
Telephone, Holborn 257.

CHURCH RACKHAM & CO

A. J. HARRISOTT.
DONALD MACLEAN.

46, Lincoln's Inn Fields,
London, W.C.2.

7th January 1925

Dear Sir,

We are much obliged for the
information contained in your letter
of the 3rd inst., and await to hear
further from you.

Yours faithfully,

Herbert Harrisott

D. Ravestein, Esq.,
Groenekan,
Mr. Utrecht,
Holland.

21 February 1925)

Dear Sirs,

Now that a few weeks have past, we take the liberty of asking politely what the results were of your investigations concerning the marriage of Earl St. Maur. You will understand that we are interested in the course of the investigation. We would be much obliged, when you could inform us what the fruits of your investigation have been, because we have been informing you on a regular basis, which has cost us a lot of time and money. Hoping you will inform us, we sign, yours sincerely,

your servant

D. Ravestein

Opzinken bij Uitzicht
De schied is

Wetende Heeren

Waarom de eerste boeken, zijn toe
gevoerd. ~~Uit~~ Het is de te zeggen hoe
de uitstap is geweest van de land onder-
zoekers. De betrekkingen hebben een op-
het name van Ophof. De Maatschappij
Opzig is het ook met betrekking
het beoogen verloop van de onderzochte
afzaken

Uit voort ons zeer teop. Het is inder-
de om een omgange wilde mededeelen
dat de vreden zijn geweest van
een op oporing. Het is de onder-
licking om de nog van de
waarde zijn geweest F

Hopen de dat U ons van de
ander gult willen vertelken
tekenen bij met de meeste
hoogachtung. De uwe.

J. Raver de uwe

**D. RAVESTEIN,
GROENEGAN.**

HANDEL IN KOLONIALE-
EN GRUTTERSWAREN
WIJNEN EN LIKEUREN

GROENEGAN.

192



VOOR

van D. RAVESTEIN.

F. Daar wij te van onze
inrichting steeds hebben
en onze gas kosten nog meer
hebben gespaard.

Telegrams: Chertibilla Welb. London.

Telephone: Holborn 257.

CHURCH RACKHAM & CO

A. J. HARRIOTT
DONALD HADLEY

46, Lincoln's Inn Fields,
London, W.C.2.

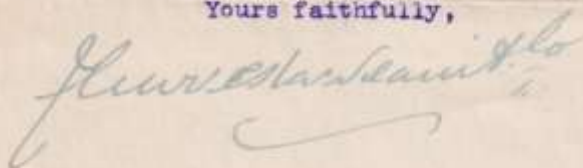
24th February 1925

Dear Sir,

re St. Maur

We are in receipt of your letter of the 21st inst. We have not yet been able to trace the place of marriage of Earl St. Maur or to obtain any direct evidence. If you can do anything further to assist us we shall be extremely obliged.

Yours faithfully,



D. Ravestein, Esq.

Telegrams: Wharfedale Field, Halifax
Telephone: Wakefield 227.

CHURCH BACKHAM & CO.

A. A. BENTLEY,
Solely Proprietor.

40, Lincoln's Inn Fields,
London, W.C.2.

3rd March 1925

Dear Sir,

re St. Maur

We duly received your letter of the 24th January, since which we have been in communication with Mrs. Kentisbeer and Mr. Riadon. We regret to say that neither of them can give any information of value. We have been unable to trace Mr. Sampson. If you could let us have any further information we should be extremely grateful.

Yours faithfully,

Fluorescence

W.A. Ravesteyn, Esq.

Dear Sirs,

It has been some weeks ago we received your last letter, so you will understand that we are interested in the course of the investigation, namely the investigation concerning the marriage of Earl St. Maur. When your research has resulted in the intended outcome, which we may expect now, we trust that the reward will be sent to us.

Yours sincerely,

D. Ravestein

Willelmus Huisman

Het is reeds meer eenige tijde geleden, dat wij
van U het laatste bericht ontvingen, zodat wij
niet te begrijpen dat wij ongezijde betaling zullen
kunnen in hoeverre de zaken nu aangekomen zijn,
het ons onmogelijk is betaling te betalen op het
moment van graaf H. Huisman

U heeft mede het onderzocht heeft men
beiden tot het bedoelde resultaat, zodat wij Huisman
nagen verwaaiten. Vertrouwen wij dat ook de
bedoelde beloning ons tegenwoordig zal worden
toegewezen

Met de meeste hoogachtung

Uw dienaar

Willelmus Huisman

Telegrams: Churchills Hotel, London.
Telephone: Holborn 257.

CHURCH RACKHAM & CO

A. J. HARRISOTT.
DONALD MACLEAN.

46, Lincoln's Inn Fields,
London, W.C.2.

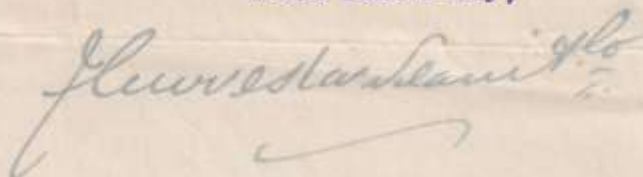
5th May 1925.

Dear Sir,

re Swan

We are in receipt of your letter of the 27th ulto. We have not yet been able to trace the marriage of Earl St.Maur. We shall be glad to receive any information you can give us to this end.

Yours faithfully,



D. Ravestein, Esq.

26 September 1925)

Dear Sirs,

We are surprised that we haven't heard from you recently on the investigation concerning the relations of Earl St. Maur. We assume, the lady will have been found by now and we expect nothing else than you will soon send us the reward of 50 pounds. Because our inquiries have been so important to you we expect nothing else than you will soon send us the 50 pound reward mentioned in the advertisement.

Meestere Heeren

Met verwondering ontfangen
dat wij nog niets anders gehoord
hebben aangaande het Koninkrijk
besprekende de bekrachtiging van Grijp
St. Maars.

Ons dunkt, thans zal genoemde
Grijp wel gevonden zijn verwachten
wij ook niet anders dan dat U
ons binnentert, de beloning
bedragende R. 50. - tusschen

Naar onze inrichting van U
van zoo groot belang zijn geweest
verwachten wij ook niet anders
dan dat U ons binnentert de in
de advertentie genoemde R. 50. -
tusschen.

Hoogachtend

Wij uw. dienaar
L. S. J. - De Rans

Telegrams: Oberlinke Wolk, London.
Telephone: Welbeck 207.

CHURCH HACKHAM & CO

10, MARK LANE
LONDON, E.C. 3.

46, Grosvenor Park, Fields,
London, W. 1.

29th September 1925

Dear Sir,

We are this morning in receipt of your letter of
the 26th inst.

Our advertisement was for proof of the marriage of
Earl St. Maur. Any information you have given us has solely
referred to Jacob Ravestein and has not complied with the
advertisement. It is therefore absurd for you to ask us
to remit you the reward.

Yours faithfully,

Edward Stark

D. Ravestein, Esq.

Encl.

Telegrams, Commercial: Polk, London.

Telephone, Holborn 257.

CHURCH RACKHAM & CO

46, Lincoln's Inn Fields,
London, W.C.2.

A. J. HARRIS.
DONALD MACLEOD.

10th November 1925

Dear Sir,

re St. Maur

We are obliged for your letter of the 4th inst. We certainly think you should not be out of pocket in connection with the matter and have pleasure in enclosing you our cheque for £3.

If you can supply us with any further information we shall be glad.

Yours faithfully,

Flurvestein

D. Ravestein, Esq.

Appendix 2

The Union Hotel

THE UNION HOTEL

TORQUAY



Auctioneers :
Messrs. WAYCOTT
5 FLEET STREET, TORQUAY
(Tel. 4333)
AND AT PAIGNTON

By Order of W. A. Raveston, Esq.

TORQUAY

The very valuable imposing Freehold Premises

known as

THE UNION HOTEL

UNION STREET

3 Bars, Excellent Cellarage, Lounge, Dining Room,
2 Sitting Rooms, 30 Bedrooms, 2 Bathrooms, Staff Room,
3 Good Stock Rooms, and Garage Accommodation for
15 cars.

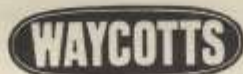
Street frontage, 40 feet, approx.

Site area 6000 sq. feet, approx.

being a

FULLY LICENSED FREE HOUSE

Will be offered for Sale by Public Auction, subject to Conditions
of Sale, by Messrs.



at the QUEEN'S HOTEL, TORQUAY, on

TUESDAY, 23rd JULY, 1946

at 3 o'clock

Particulars and Street plan from :—

The Auctioneers :

5, Fleet Street, Torquay.

(Tel. 4333—3 lines).

and at Paignton.

The Solicitors :

Messrs. Kitsons, Easterbrook & Co.

Torquay.

Tel. 2229.

THE UNION HOTEL

UNION STREET, TORQUAY,

occupies a "key" site in the premier shopping position between Messrs. Mogridge & Co., Ltd., and Stead & Simpson Ltd. It is a

Fully Licensed Free House

which has been well run for many years as a good class Family and Commercial Hotel, and it has a sound clientele.

The Plan subjoined to these particulars shows, at a glance, the adjacent occupiers and it is immediately apparent that this property occupies a position which is unsurpassed in the shopping centre. It is capable of economic renovation, or it is also eminently suitable for conversion to shop premises.

THE ACCOMMODATION comprises :

Ground Floor. A stone porch, supported by twin Doric columns, overhangs the pavement and leads to the Hall, off which are Lounge Bar, 39'8" x 14', half-panelled, and with door opening to Gents' Lavatory, fitted 2-stall urinal, lavatory basin (h. & c.) and new W.C.; Saloon Bar, 31'10" x 16' at its widest, with half-panelled walls; Gents' Bar, 17' x 17'6" at its widest, half-panelled, with composition floor; Kitchen with stone flagged floor, service lift, shelving, trough (c.) and dresser; Larder with cement floor and shelving; Food Store with shelving; Excellent Cellarage with cement floor.

From a modest Dutch origin to the bustling streets of Victorian Torquay, Jacob Ravesteyn's life was anything but ordinary. A hotelier, businessman, and family man, he navigated tragedy, ambition, and social intrigue with determination. From the early days managing the Prince of Wales beerhouse to owning the prominent Union Hotel, Jacob became a central figure in the town's vibrant commercial and social life.

Behind his success, however, lingered mysteries: the true origins of his family, the military medals he claimed, and his possible connection to a secret aristocratic marriage that could have altered the line of succession of the Duke of Somerset. Through loss, reinvention, and ambition, Jacob carved a life that bridged two countries, leaving a legacy intertwined with both family enterprise and local history.

Eddy Habben Jansen tells the story of *Jacob Ravesteyn*, a cousin of his great-grandfather. In the words of historian Brian Masters, Jacob truly was “a mysterious gentleman.”



Eddy at Jacob's grave in 2011

